DEMOGRAPHIC PROBLEMS OF THE LEBANON

By ELIASH EPSTEIN

[3] [4] [5] THE Lebanese Republic covers an area of about 10,000 sq. k.* The population was last assessed in the Order of the President dated July 15, 1945, on the number of citizens registered in the registration records on December 31, 1942. This Order also referred to a number of Lebanese who had emigrated but had retained their Lebanese citizenship.

[14] The Order in question was published in connection with the elections to the Lebanese Parliament. Although the Muslim communities disagreed with the correctness of the number given, the Order remains the official document guiding the holding of a general Census which will determine the figures more precisely.

[1, 2, 16] The following is the table which served as the foundation for fixing the population of the Lebanon as on January 1, 1945:†

Communities	Inhabitants	Emigrants	Total
Maronites	376,000	91,000	467,000
Sunni	175,000	6,000	181,000
Shi'ah	100,000	5,000	105,000
Greek Orthodox	148,000	22,000	170,000
Druze	71,000	4,000	75,000
Greek Catholics	61,000	13,000	74,000
Armenian Orthodox (Gregorians)	58,000	60	58,000
Minorities	61,000	6,000	67,000
Total	1,050,000	150,000	1,200,000

[6, 7] The following are the estimated figures for the movements of population in the Lebanon, and the estimated natural increase:‡

Communities	1939 Census	End 1945	Difference	Percentage
Sunni	170,000	181,000	11,000	7.1
Shi'ah	100,000	105,000	5,000	5.0
Druze	68,000	75,000	7,000	10.0
Maronites ...	406,000	467,000	61,000	15.0
Greek Catholics	70,000	74,000	4,000	5.7
Greek Orthodox	160,000	170,000	10,000	6.3

[6, 7] [16] [17] The conservative conclusions which can be drawn from these tables are:
(a) Most of the emigrants from the Lebanon and those who continue

* Since the demarcation of the Syro-Lebanese Frontier has not been completed, estimates of the area of the two States vary. The area of the Autonomous Sanjak of the Lebanon (Mutasarrifiyah) was 6,000 kilometres and its population was 400,000.

† "The Races of Palestine," Bulletin, survey 8, 1945.

‡ *Ibid.* The figures in these tables and the statistical calculations should be compared with similar surveys as answers of the mathematical methods used for demographical statistics in the Lebanon.

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shown in the table above are found in other parts of the Middle East but three religions were used mention here: the Druses, who are a mountain people professing a religion which derived from Islam in the eleventh century A.D., but became independent; the Alawis of the mountains behind Latakia, whose religion appears to be a dogmatic form of Shii Islam with some survivals of Christian ritual; and the Maronites, who are a Christian sect, living mainly in the north of Lebanon.

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The religion of the majority of Syrians and of the head of the Syrian state is Sunni Islam; in the Lebanon, Muslims and Christians are fairly evenly divided and the President of the Republic is a Maronite Christian and the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim. The Christians of the Arab Levant have provided the Middle East with great leaders in journalism, letters, politics, and science, but in present-day Syria the Christians are mainly prominent in commerce and industry. There is hardly any dangerous animosity between the sects, but sectarian bonds are a very real force in the lives of people who for so long lived under the Turkish *millet* system whereby each sect was an administrative unit, the head of which exercised considerable authority.

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So mixed a population living in a variety of environments naturally does not constitute one physical type, but some generalizations are haunted for the sake of a fuller picture. Dark hair is almost universal but the skin of the town dweller is no darker than that of a Mediterranean European; the Syrians and Lebanese are not often as tall or as heavy as the average Englishman but they mature at an earlier age. The poorer normal eats mainly bread, with milk and fruit and vegetables as less frequent additions and meat as an event, but in the towns and villages most people eat a full diet with rather more oil and spice than is used in Britain. The cultivator and the nomad wear local costumes but most townspeople wear European clothes; the turban or the head-cloth are usual but not universal headgear for men. Most Muslim women wear the veil, but in the towns the richer women are becoming more and more emancipated and, particularly in Beirut, many lead the same lives as Christian women. In Lebanon and in Damascus and Aleppo the way of life is very like that in southern Europe, and both countries make a pleasant home for a European.

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History

Semitic-speaking people have inhabited for four or five millennia the area which is known historically as Syria, or yet for much of this period the rulers of what is now Syria or

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Lebanon were foreigners. Today it is still possible to see near Beirut the traces of the successive conquerors—Egyptians, Hittites, Assyrians, Persians, Alexander the Great, and, in the first century B.C., Rome. The Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire was supplanted by the Arab Muslim conquest which took Damascus in A.D. 635. The Arab invaders gave the people of Syria their name, their religion, and their language, but the rulers also learned much from their new subjects, and it was from Damascus that the Umayyad Caliphs ruled Islam from 661 to 750. Many of the chief servants of the Umayyads were Syrian-born and, of these, many were Christians, so that this period might be considered one of Syrian independence; but in 750 the Caliphate passed to the Abbasids who made their capital in Iraq. Syria fell under different foreign rulers as the power passed successively to Abbasids, Fatimids, Ayyubids, Crusaders, and Mamelukes (with Mongol incursions) until, in 1516, the Ottoman Empire took possession of the land.

The Ottoman Empire

Under the rule of the Turks, Syria produced little save taxes for the Porte and emoluments for the pashas. The corrupt rule of most of these governors aimed at personal enrichment and made little attempt to control the land beyond gunshot of the citadels or to advance the social or economic state of those they governed. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century what local prosperity there was occurred when some local leader succeeded in making himself autonomous in defiance of the remote authority of the Ottoman Sultan; the classic case is the reign of the Druze Amir Fakhr ad-Din al-Maani (1558–1635) who encouraged agriculture and trade with Europe. Such autonomy was naturally more easily achieved in the Christian and Druze fastnesses of the Lebanese mountains than in the cities of inner Syria; there the Ottomans maintained their authority by exploiting the rivalry of sects and clans, and so contributed to the impermanence and lack of solidarity which persist as a feature of contemporary public life. This fragmentation of society is even more characteristic of Lebanon, since in the mid-nineteenth century a social conflict between the emergent Maronite peasantry and their Druze overlords was not only exploited by the Ottoman authorities but also became a factor in the struggle between France and Britain to control the Levant. The conflict culminated in a civil war which led the Powers in 1861 to detach from the Ottoman Sultan the establishment of the autonomous Sanjaq of Lebanon (including the then predominantly Muslim cities of Beirut, Tripoli, and Sidon)

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under a Christian governor. Already for one generation, after the interruption caused by the Napoleonic Wars, missionaries from Western Christendom had been laying the foundations of an intellectual revival—chiefly among the Lebanese Christians, but also in the Syrian cities; and the foundation in 1866 of the Syrian Protestant College (renamed in 1920 the American University of Beirut) is a landmark in the early history of Arab nationalism. Religious minorities thus acquired the habit of looking to some Western patron for material support and for protection against the majority of their neighbours and their government; thus the Maronites depended on France, the Orthodox on Imperial Russia, the local Jews on the Alliance Israélite and on Britain, the Protestants on the United States, Britain, or Germany. Emigrations to the Americas or Europe further opened the cultural windows of Christian Lebanese and emigrants to Egypt founded there a modern Arabic literature, while the granting of public utility concessions, especially for railways, to French companies and others increased the Western interest in the country.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Young Turks, who were at first supported by the leaders of the early Arab nationalists, rose to power; but it soon became apparent that the Young Turk was to be a much a danger as the Sultan. The Arab intelligentsia of Beirut and Damascus chose, therefore, to look to the Western Powers for support[1]—a decision which they may well now be regretting. The Ottoman Governor of Syria, Jemal Pasha, carried out a drastic 'purge' of the urban nationalist leaders in 1916, but the nationalist cause had been taken up at a safer distance by the Sharif Hussein of Mecca and his sons Faisal and Abdullah, who had been in correspondence with the British authorities in Egypt since before the outbreak of the First World War.[2] Their Arab Revolt was a response to Jemal Pasha's purge and the prospect of similar measures in the Hejaz. Brilliantly organized by Colonel T. E. Lawrence, it effectively harassed the left wing of the Ottoman front on the desert margin while Allenby was breaking the main resistance in the Palestine campaign. When the Ottomans were collapsed after the British victory at Megiddo, a small body of Arabs from the Amir Faisal's army were the first to reach Damascus. Faisal was given authority by General Allenby over all territory east of the Jordan, down to Aqaba, but by the Arabs he was regarded rather as an independent ally on the throne of the Umayyads. However, Faisal had scarcely appointed

[1] See George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (London, Hamilton, 1938).
[2] See also section (a) above, pp. 11–18.

ed a governor for Lebanon, before the latter was displaced by the French (whose historic interest in Lebanon had been recognized by the British Government in the correspondence with the Sharif Hussein). While Faisal and Lawrence were presenting the Arab case to the Paris Peace Conference, the French were consolidating their military hold on the Levant. Eventually Faisal and Clemenceau came to a provisional agreement for an autonomous Syrian state under the tutelage of France (as envisaged by Britain in the secret Sykes–Picot Agreement of 1916, which had not been communicated at the time to the Sharif and his sons); but French tutelage was not acceptable to the Damascus politicians who in March 1920 proclaimed Faisal King of an independent Syrian state. In the following month, however, the French obtained Britain's agreement, at the San Remo Conference, to their exercising a Mandate over Syria as well as Lebanon; the new Mandatory defeated Faisal's little army at Maisalun on 25 July 1920 and entered into possession of Damascus, from which Faisal fled into exile.

The French Mandate, 1920–45

Since Crusader times, France had been interested in protecting the Christians of the Levant, and the twentieth century gave her the added incentive of creating a counter-balance to Britain's growing influence in the Middle East. The Maronites welcomed the French, and the latter accordingly expanded the small area of the Sanjaq of Lebanon to include the cities of Beirut, Tripoli, and Sidon, as well as the Biqa, so as to give this 'Greater Lebanon' the largest possible area in which there would be no danger of a Muslim majority. The French applied to Syria the principle of *divide et impera* and four separate states were set up: that of the Alawis (Jebel Ansariya, including Latakia), that of the Jebel Druze, and Damascus and Aleppo (in 1925 combined into a single state of Syria). The French further encouraged separatism in the Jezira, and fragmented the area of Antioch and Alexandretta (in which the largest linguistic community was the Turkish) as an autonomous sanjaq.

The majority of Syrians never readily accepted French rule and risings occurred (the Ansariya, near Aleppo, and near Deir ez-Zor); these were soon put down but a greater rebellion began in the Jebel Druze in 1925 and spread to Damascus and to Hama. The French bombarded Damascus in October 1925 and in May 1926 but did not succeed in completely quelling the revolt until August 1927. Thereafter negotiations for a treaty stumbled through the years, punctuated by disturbances, broken off from time to time and marked throughout by inter-

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[For a survey of the political history of Lebanon before and during the French mandate, and information on westernization, sectarianism, and nationalism in Lebanon, see Al Hourani, MEI Syria, category 126, entire source.]